

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9903
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 COLOMBO 1395

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CE
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO JAFFNA

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR AND MRS. WRIGGINS WITH POL OFFICER DAVIS KNOWLTON AND USIS LOCAL P. THAMBIRAJAH VISITED TAMIL MINORITY KEY CITY OF JAFFNA FOR FIVE FULL DAYS, MARCH 17 TO 22. THEY VISITED REFUGEE CAMPS AND FORMER AMERICAN MISSIONARY SCHOOLS; ATTENDED CHURCH SERVICE; DONATED USIS BOOKS TO JAFFNA PUBLIC, FORMERLY USIS, LIBRARY; VISITED CEY-NOR FERRO-CEMENT FISHING BOAT AND KANKASUSTARAI CEMENT PLANTS; AND AGRICULTURAL WATER MANAGEMENT AND EXTENSION SERVICES. THEY DINED WITH OFFICIALS, PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AT JAFFNA COLLEGE AND MP'S FROM THE AREA, THE LATTER ALL MEMBERS OF TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF). HIGH POINTS WERE AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH ON HUMAN RIGHTS DELIVERED AT INVITATION OF LOCAL BRANCH OF UN ASSOCIATION ATTENDED BY ABOUT 200 OF JAFFNA'S LEADING LAWYERS, PROFESSIONALS, PROFESSORS, BUSINESSMEN, AND OFFICIALS; AND RECEPTION ORGANIZED
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BY EMBASSY FOR SOME 65 LEADING CITIZEN. END SUMMARY.

2. POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.

GENERAL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE WAS CALM; SECURITY OFFICIALS WERE RELAXED AND IMPOSED NO RESTRICTIONS THOUGH PROVIDED POLICE ESCORT AT NIGHT AND WHEN PARTY

WENT OUT OF JAFFNA. POLICE IN FAR BETTER SHAPE NOW THEN LAST AUGUST WITH NEW AND APPARENTLY SUPERIOR LEADERSHIP, STRICTER DISCIPLINE AND MIXED TAMIL-SINHALESE PATROLS. TULF YOUTH ARE FOR THE MOMENT HOLDING BACK TO SEE HOW JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT IS GOING TO COPE. HOPEFUL SIGNS ARE HALF OF MISSIONARY-FOUNDED JAFFNA COLLEGE AND LIBRARY CAMPUS WHICH TAKEN OVER BY PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT FOR UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA NORTHERN CAMPUS ARE TO BE RETURNED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE; END OF STANDARDIZATION AND EXPANSION OF UNIVERSITY ENTRANTS MEANS THAT MORE YOUNG TAMILS WILL FIND PLACES IN THE UNIVERSITY. AND MANY TAMILS THINK JAYEWARDENE IS ON THE RIGHT TRACK, THOUGH THEY BELIEVE SOME OF HIS SINHALESE ASSOCIATES REMAIN STRONG COMMUNALISTS AND MAY IN THE END BLOCK THE CHANGES HE IS BELIEVED TO FAVOR IN ORDER TO ASSUAGE TAMIL ANXIETIES.

3. REFUGEE CAMPS.

REFUGEE CAMPS APPEARED TO BE PROPERLY USING EQUIPMENT MADE AVAILABLE BY USG. ALL TENTS ACCOUNTED FOR; PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES IN USE; BLANKETS AND SHEETS SEEN. CAMP C, MADE UP MAINLY OF FORMER AGRICULTURALISTS FROM MANY PARTS OF THE ISLAND, WERE ALREADY CLEARING THEIR NEW LAND AND SEEMED HAPPY AS CLAMS. CAMP A, CONFIDENTIAL

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WITH MORE SHOPKEEPERS, WAS FULL OF COMPLAINTS BUT NOT AGAINST USG. CATHOLIC SISTERS WERE HOLDING SCHOOL FOR BOTH. LOCAL RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL SEEMED KNOWLEDGEABLE, AND DOING HIS BEST, SEEKING AMONG OTHER THINGS, CASH SUBSIDIES FOR WELLS AND CLEARING JUNGLE FROM ASSIGNED LAND. NO REQUESTS FOR MORE USG ASSISTANCE.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS SPEECH.

HUMAN RIGHTS SPEECH BASED ON USIS FEB. 9, 1978 WIRELESS FILE DRAFT AND ELABORATED FOR LOCAL RELEVANCE WENT OVER WELL AND QUESTION TIME WAS LIVELY. AMBASSADOR ENJOYED AVOIDING OBVIOUS TRAPS LAID GOOD HUMOREDLY FOR A VISITING AMERICAN AMBASSADOR.

5. USIS LIBRARY.

THIS AREA TRADITIONALLY HAD CLOSE TIES WITH AMERICANS AS A RESULT OF INTENSE MISSIONARY ACTIVITY. THESE CONNECTIONS HAVE FOR GENERATIONS GIVEN STUDIOUS TAMILS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN SRI

ALNKA, MALAYSIA AND ELSEWHERE WHICH HAS CONTRIBUTED TO RESENTMENT AGAINST THEM. THE EXODUS OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES IN EARLY 1970'S , THE CLOSING OF THE USIS LIBRARY IN 1974, AND THE GENERAL DIFFICULTIES PUT IN THE WAY OF MIDDLE CLASS TAMILS BY SUCCESSIVE SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SEFP) GOVERNMENTS WERE NOT ABLE (OR READY TO REDRESS), LEFT THEM FEELING BEREFT. AND THE COST OF FOREIGN BOOKS IS NOW PROHIBITIVE. MANY EXPRESSED THE HOPE WE WOULD REOPEN THE USIS LIBRARY, BUT AMBASSADOR CITED BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS MAKING THAT IMPOSSIBLE. UNFORTUNATELY, THE FORMER USIS LIBRARY --WHICH IS AN IMPRESSIVE PLANT--HAS HAD ITS STAFF POLITICIZED AND ONLY NOW IS A WELL-TRAINED LIBRARIAN ATTEMPTING TO REBUILD PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND

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CONTROL.

6. FISHING INDUSTRY.

THE CEY-NOR PLANT MANUFACTURING FERRO-CMENT FISHING BOATS AND FISHING NETS, STARTED BY A NORWEGIAN PRIVATE GROUP, IS IMPRESSIVE, SHOWING WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BY WAY OF INSTITUTION-BUILDING ON A SHOESTRING IF TEN YEARS ARE DEVOTED TO IT, LOCAL PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED FROM THE BEGINNING AND A SMALL, IMAGINATIVE FOREIGN STAFF KEEP AT IT. TRAWLING IS FINALLY BEGINNING TO CATCH ON, IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE NEAR TOTAL FUTILITY OF A MUCH MORE COSTLY BUT QUICKIE CANADIAN AID PROGRAM OF 15 YEARS AGO.

7. TECHNICAL TRAINING.

JAFFNA COLLEGE, STILL SUPPORTED BY UNITED CHURCH BOARD OF FOREIGN MINISTRIES OF BOSTON, HAS INGENUOUSLY DIVERSIFIED ITS SUPPORT AND INDUCED DUTCH AID GROUP TO BUILD NEW TECHNICAL TRAINING INSTITUTE. OBSOLESCE LEADERSHIP AND CASTE TRADITIONS INHIBIT LOCAL BOYS FROM GOING TECHNICAL INSTEAD OF ACADEMIC, THOUGH A NEARBY GOVERNMENT-RUN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE, AGAINST STEREOTYPED EXPECTATION, IS REPORTEDLY DOING WELL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 COLOMBO 1395

8. FARMERS AND FISHERMEN DOING WELL.

JAFFNA FARMERS AND FISHERMEN ARE NOTORIOUSLY HARD
WORKING AND GO AHEAD.THE LANDSCAPE AND SURROUNDING
WATERS AHVE A DIFFERENT LOOK NOW THAN 20 YEARS
AGO. MANY CADJEN FENCES REMAIN BUT THERE ARE
MORE CEMENT WALLS FOR THE JAFFNA MAN LIKES TO
ENCLOSE HIS LAND AND PROTECT HIS WOMEN. THE
FAMILIAR FIGURE ON THE WELL-SWEEP SEE-SAW WALKING
BACK AND FORTH TO BRING UP A BUCKET OF WATER IS VIRTUALLY
GONE, FOR THE PROSPEROUS JAFFNA FARMER NOW HAS WELLS
WITH ELECTRIC PUMPS. THERE ARE MORE CARS,MORE
TILED ROOFS, MORE COLOR-RICH SYNTHETIC SARIS. AND
THE LATEEN SAILS AGAINST THE HORIZON ARE FEW AND FAR
BETWEEN AS FISHERMEN HAVE U.S. AND JAPANESE OUTBOARD
MOTORS IN THEIR BOATS NOW.

9. IRONIES IN TAMIL GRIEVANCES.

IRONICALLY ENOUGH, THE BANDARANAIKE GOVERNMENT WHICH
OFTEN PURSUED POLICIES ANTITHETICAL TO THE INTERESTS
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OF TAMIL PROFESSIONAL CLASSES BY LIMITING TAMIL
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY AND
GIVING PREFERENCE TO SINHALESE CANDIDATES,PROVIDED
SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES TO TAMIL
FARMERS BY PROHIBITING THE INPUT OF CHEAP INDIAN
VEGETABLES.AS PRICES FOR CHILLIES, ONIONS,GRAM

AND TOBACCO ROSE, SO DID FARMERS INCOMES.EASY CREDIT FOR OUTBOARDS ENCOURAGED THE SWITCH TO MORORIZED FISHING BOATS,SO TAMIL ETHNIC ANGUISH IS MAINLY A MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS AFFAIR THOUGH ALL WHO GAIN AN EDUCATION (AND THEIR PARENTS) EVEN FROM HUMBLE BACKGROUNDS FEEL CAREER LIMITATIONS PREVIOUS GENERATIONS DID NOT KNOW. AND LAND SHORTAGE IS FELT TO BE INCREASINGLY SERIOUS. ON THE OTHER HAND,MANY OF THE MORE WEALTHY HAVE ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH.

10. POLITICAL EFFECTS.

THE POLITICAL FALLOUT FROM THESE FORCES IS HARD TO PREDICT. ON BALANCE WE THINK THE GOVERNMENT CAN WAFFLE FOR SIX OR EIGHT MONTHS MORE BEFORE THE RESTLESS EDUCATED YOUTH WILL RISK UNPREDICTABLE FORMS OF DIRECT ACTION.WHETHER THEY DO WILL DEPEND UPON MANY FACTORS, INCLUDING: (1) PERCEIVED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUNG; (2) HOW THE JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON EDUCATION, LAND SETTLEMENT AND IRRIGATION APPEAR TO AFFECT YOUNGER TAMILS; (3) THE STYLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICE; AND (4) WHETHER THE TULF LEADERSHIP,NOW THOUGHT TO BE GENERALLY MORE MODERATE THAN DURING THE ELECTION, HOLDS THE RESPECT OF THE YOUNG.

11. NAVAL ATTENTION NOW ON FISHING TRAWLERS.
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REFLECTING THE REDUCED PROSPECTS FOR TAMILS OUTSIDE THE JAFFNA PENINSULA, ILLICIT IMMIGRATION FROM INDIA IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM. SMUGGLING HAS DROPPED OFF SHARPLY SINCE THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS OPENED UP THE ECONOMY. THE NORTHERN NAVAL STATION IS STILL ACTIVELY PATROLLING,BUT NOW LARGE EAST ASIAN TRAWLERS INTRUDING IN THE 200 MILE ECONOMIC ZONE AND SMALLER,MOTORIZED FISHERMEN FROM INDIA ARE MORE IMPORTANT TARGETS.

12. COMMENT: POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN NORTHERN SRI LANKA AND THE SOUTH SEEM FAR BETTER THAN AT ANY TIME DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS. ALTHOUGH ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ARE BETTER FOR FARMERS AND FISHERMEN, THE PROSPECTS FOR THE AMBITIOUS EDUCATED TAMILS REMAIN MORE LIMITED THAN TEN YEARS AGO. AND THE MEMORY OF THE AUGUST 1977 RIOTS MAKES MANY

TAMILS WITH ROOTS IN THE SOUTH FAR MORE ANXIOUS

(IN SOME CASES REALLY FRIGHTENED) THAN AT ANY
TIME SINCE 1958. UNLESS THE JAYEWARDENE GOVERNMENT
PROVES UNWILLING TO MOVE ON A FEW OTHER--AND FAR
LESS SERIOUS--MIDDLE CLASS GRIEVANCES, WE ARE
SANGUINE THAT THE SEPARATISTS CAUSE WILL RAPIDLY
DECLINE. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR OTHER ASPECTS
OF SINHALESE-TAMIL RELATIONS.ON BALANCE WE THINK
REAL PROGRESS IS BEING MADE DESPITE THE SHRILL
COMPLAINTS OF REFUGEE GROUPS FAR FROM THE SCENE.
DEBOLD

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Message Attributes

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